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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 001306

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SUBJECT: REACTION TO IRAQI ELECTION RESULTS IN JORDAN

REF: AMMAN 1201

Classified By: CDA David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

1. (U) Jordanians remain concerned about the status of Sunnis in a Shia-dominated transitional Iraqi government, but analysts are hopeful that the Iraqi elections will contribute to democratization in the region. Local press continues to accentuate negative analyses of the election, but a growing number of commentators have begun to question the wisdom of the Sunni boycott, as well as the true motives and legitimacy of the insurgency. End Summary.

Jordanian Reaction

2. (U) In recent discussions with emboffs, prominent Jordanian political analysts have expressed generally positive views on the Iraqi election results, but most remained reserved in their commentary as they considered low-level Sunni participation to be a critical shortcoming. A common thread in their opinions was surprise at the strength of the Kurdish vote and the inability of IIG PM Allawi to attract more support. They attributed Allawi's relatively poor showing to his lack of appeal among Shia Muslims due to his secular stance. Echoing the sentiments of many ordinary Jordanians, all saw weak Sunni participation as a pitfall that will cause future problems. They highlighted the challenge of bringing Sunni representatives into the political process in a way that would give them legitimacy to act on behalf of a group that mostly refused to vote. Despite these apprehensions, the analysts were cautiously optimistic that the better-than-expected Iraqi elections would contribute to calls for democratization throughout the region.

Press Reaction Mixed

3. (U) Predicting dire outcomes and a likely civil war in the lead up to elections, Jordan's press since January 30 has moved toward acceptance of the election results as -- like it or not -- an expression of majority will in Iraq. Prominent columnists with Arab national leanings have continued to accentuate the negative, focusing on the low level of Sunni participation and the fact that the election was held "under occupation," but a significant number of others have congratulated the Iraqis for braving threats to vote (reftel). Journalists are also beginning to question both the wisdom of Sunni leaders who urged a boycott and the true motives of the armed "resistance." Still reflected in the media are persistent populist (and perhaps official) fears of a coming Shia hegemony, with added angst caused by the perception that such an outcome appears to be occurring within a "U.S.-engineered" process.

Iraqi Feedback

4. (U) Meanwhile, our feedback on the election from Iraqis resident in Jordan continues to be overwhelmingly positive, if only guardedly so among Sunnis who by and large liked the process, but disliked the outcome. Several Iraqi contacts expressed pride in their countrymen for casting off "decades of dictatorship," by voting in large numbers despite the many challenges and intimidation. Nonetheless, most contacts agreed that many obstacles remain and viewed the elections and formation of a transitional government as an intermediate phase in a long road to democracy and stability. All hoped that truly representative Sunnis will play a meaningful role in drafting the constitution; one Sunni source called the election a "wake-up call to participate," and many contacts said that their Sunni friends who boycotted the elections now regret not voting.

Comment

15. (C) The elections in Iraq have provided a hopeful ray of light in the pessimistic thoughts of opinion-makers in Amman, and may even presage an important shifting in local media focus on Iraq from the insurgency to the emerging democracy. However, this positive trend could quickly dissipate if a viable Iraqi government fails to form or instability appears to increase in Iraq. End Comment.

16. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.

HALE